

JEWISH IDENTITIES AND TRADITIONS WITHIN THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD:
FUNERARY UNGUENTARIA AS EVIDENCE OF INVENTIVE TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that unguentaria, a material often overlooked within theoretical studies, has untapped potential to further contemporary models of identity formation. This argument is framed within the observation that though recent scholarly efforts have argued against essentialist presentations of Hellenistic Jewish identities, these efforts tend to rely heavily upon textual evidence. Such a reliance is problematic because these sources relate the perspective of only a select, “elite” portion of Jewish society. This thesis uses a case study focused upon burial unguentaria from Jerusalem to assert that unguentaria may be used to counter this limitation. The vessels’ capacity to amend this current situation rests in the very characteristic which has for so long kept them isolated from theoretical studies, namely their ubiquity throughout the material record.

The case study begins with a short descriptive overview, after which the significance of unguentaria within contemporary theories of inventive tradition and narrative identity formation is outlined. Upon discussing how unguentaria relate to ideas of non-essentialized identity construction, this thesis then contextualizes its theoretical application of unguentaria within current text-based scholarly trends, especially the here-termed “engaged model.” The project concludes by reiterating that unguentaria should not be viewed as inconsequential materials but instead dynamic components of the archaeological record with the capacity to positively inform ongoing scholarly discussions.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Marianna Nichols began her academic career at Judson College in Marion, Alabama. From her alma mater Miss Nichols acquired two undergraduate degrees, respectively in the fields of History and Religious Studies. Miss Nichols has applied these varying interests to her archaeological efforts and has been involved with a number of projects in Israel, including the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon.

For the young man who sat across from me at the communal table in England and made me love
Augustus almost as much as he did.

- Mari

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Jewish Identities and Traditions within the Hellenistic Period: Funerary Unguentaria as Evidence of Inventive Tradition

1) Introduction

Recent scholarly conversations have highlighted new ways of conceptually engaging with non-essentialized identity construction during the Hellenistic period. Such trends have been particularly acute within studies of the era's Jewish communities. One of the more notable developments is the approach which will be referred to by this thesis as the "engaged model"; however, both this and other efforts have typically relied upon textual evidence when articulating their particular arguments. This reliance is problematic because these sources can provide only a limited viewpoint into the extent of non-essentialized identity construction within Jewish society.

The goal of this thesis is to argue that a historically overlooked class of archaeological material, namely funerary unguentaria, do indeed have theoretical significance and should be more readily integrated into developing theories of identity construction. This aim will be accomplished by illustrating how these materials may be used to strategically confront the outlined problem that exists within text-based applications of identity theory. Unguentaria's ability to interact with the particular issue at hand rests in the very quality which has long prevented their theoretical utilization, namely their ubiquitous placement throughout different social strata. Within this thesis, this feature will be positioned within current approaches to Hellenistic Jewish identity in order to ultimately assert that nuanced processes of identity formation were taking place not only within the social elite who created extant texts but also the wider population of Jewish society. This case study hence highlights the need for scholars to more readily integrate "common" aspects of the archaeological record into future theoretical applications.

2) Introducing the Case Study

Past appeals to Jewish traditions have tended to be one-sided and unnuanced, referring to them as merely “normative prescriptions” (Eckhardt 2012: 11) passing “from generation to generation seemingly without variance” (Collins 1983: 2). Certainly it is reasonable to assert that finding commonality and continuity with the past was a significant means of self-reflection for Jews within the Hellenistic period (cf. Collins 1983: 273-274; Gruen 1998). Indeed, Hasmonean appeals to ancestral tradition indicate that these reflections were an important means by which the Jews established a sense of their cultural locus both in relation to one another and the wider cultural spheres in which they interacted (Collins 2003: 150; Vasile 2018). However, these simplistic presentations do not productively incorporate current perspectives concerning tradition’s “inventive” qualities (Palmisano and Pannofino 2017) or take into consideration the significance of those qualities within studies of Hellenistic-era identities.

The scholar who has most clearly articulated a more nuanced sense of Jewish tradition in the Hellenistic era is Erich Gruen, who has argued that “the Jews engaged actively with the traditions of Hellas, adopting genres and transforming legends to articulate their own legacy in modes congenial to a Hellenistic setting” (Gruen 2011: 2). Yet even this appeal does not fully consider how those transformations occurred or the effects of those transformations upon localized identity construction. Furthermore, these socio-cultural divisions have historically been complicated by the adoption of such problematic concepts as “Hellenization,” which itself carries an implicit assumption of a unidirectional, deliberate cultural adoption that occurred between definitive socio-cultural groups (cf. Mairs 2013). However, currently, a more serious complication is that appeals to Jewish tradition tend to rely heavily upon textual evidence. This

reliance is problematic since these texts relate the perspective of only a select individual or social group, which, in the instance of Jewish communities, tends to be that of elite priestly or administrative families. These sources are thus effectively limited in their ability to comment upon tradition formation and the impact of those traditions within Jewish society.

The following case study will address the aforementioned limitations of these established text-based appeals by framing the topic of tradition within an archaeological context. This case study will specifically deal with burial unguentaria taken from the Jerusalem necropolis, a category of material which has typically been subject to only descriptive and typological reviews. This effort will reach beyond these past explorations and situate unguentaria within contemporary theoretical models drawn from such diverse fields as sociology and religious studies, with specific attention being placed upon the notions of inventive tradition and narrative identity. Due to the ubiquity of these items throughout the material record, both within Jewish and non-Jewish burial contexts, what this approach offers is a way to extend current arguments of non-essentialized Hellenistic identity formation to a wider portion of Jewish society.

The case study's specification of Jerusalem burial unguentaria rests on two observations. Firstly, this project's focus upon Jerusalem is drawn from the fact that scholars have long construed this city as the "core" location for Jewish identity creation during the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods. This assumption derives heavily from the city's status as the home of the Jewish Temple (cf. O'Fearghail 2002; Grabbe 2002; Shavit 1997). Though this designation is problematic due to its implicit assumption that individuals could be more or less Jewish simply as a result of their geographic location, adopting this placement makes it possible to argue that notions of embedded, inventive tradition construction took place even within a population long assumed to have remained free of excessive external cultural influence. That is, this focus is

merely being used to demonstrate that even this “most Jewish” community was just as susceptible to inventive processes as “fringe” geographic regions.

Secondly, this study’s emphasis upon mortuary settings is derived from an observation that there is a tendency to appeal to ancestral traditions and “ancient fathers” (I Maccabees 2:19, 2:49-50; II Maccabees 8:17, 11:25) within Jewish texts of the Hellenistic period. This tendency may be observed when the author of I Maccabees writes “we...claim the inheritance of our fathers” (I Maccabees 15:34). These references indicate that there was some level of ancestor reverence at play within the broader, Hellenistic Jewish community, though this conclusion is not meant to indicate that there was definitive Jewish ancestor worship within this period (cf. Schmidt 1994). The significance of the dead to questions of Jewish tradition lies in the fact that these figures were likely important actors in the transmission of social values. This association may be restated by proposing that, when interacting with the dead through the medium of mortuary rites, the living Jewish population was, in essence, negotiating its own inter-social relationships (Budja 2010). The commemoration of “ancestral ways” or “the ways of [the Jewish] fathers” provided an explicit link back to earlier members of one’s family or tribe and, more importantly, the values of those individuals, such as loyalty to one’s family or nation. Hence, through burial rites the living Jewish community would have been engaging in actions that offered them an opportunity to both reimagine and renegotiate their perception of those “ancestral” values (cf. Hertz 2004: 213-222; Huntington and Metcalf 1991). These observations are compatible with the comments of Joyce (2001), who has argued that burials are “complex intersections of processes of formation of social identities...[and] intersections of the formation of social memory, media through which social identities gained greater or lesser degrees of shared currency” (Joyce 2001: 12).

3) The Jerusalem Unguentaria

The following sample set of Jerusalem mortuary unguentaria will be restricted to those vessels previously discussed by Kahane (1952, 1953). The Jerusalem necropolis is a general term used to refer to a variety of independent tomb complexes located in and around the modern city of Jerusalem. Kloner and Zissu (2007) have provided the most extensive work to date describing this necropolis, dividing the region into 32 distinct zones. The necropolis originally encircled the city's outer boundaries, and though its circumference varied depending on historical period, it has been postulated that in the Graeco-Roman era its width averaged around five kilometers (Kloner and Zissu 2007: 112). During this period, individual tomb complexes were typically carved into limestone hills and organized along family lines (Barkay 1994: 114-115; Kloner and Zissu 2007: 11). These complexes often consisted of a primary chamber, located one or two steps below ground level, beyond which adjacent doorways would connect to additional burial or storage areas (Kloner and Zissu 2007: 29; McCane 2003: 35).

Unguentaria, occasionally known by the alternative names *lacrimaria* and *balsamaria* (Green 2008: 145-146), are a type of small glass and ceramic vessels that were widely distributed throughout the Mediterranean during both the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Anderson-Stojanović (1987: 115) has argued that unguentaria were produced at multiple sites within varying regions. Unfortunately, the reality of this manufacturing process has greatly complicated attempts to discern further details concerning unguentaria's broader development and usage, as individual sites tend to possess unique form variations.

Regardless of geography, unguentaria vary in size. Smaller examples reach a height of just 4-5 cm, whereas "giant" vessels are as tall as 20-30 cm. On average, however, the majority of

vessels fall within a middle range of 8-20 cm (Anderson-Stojanović 1987). Throughout their periods of use, unguentaria were produced in two general forms: fusiform/spindle (see Images 1 and 2) and bulbous/piriform (see Image 3). The fusiform/spindle type appears to have allowed for a great deal of variability in terms of body shape, as examples of these vessels include both slender and rounded bodies. In contrast, the piriform body shape is more consistent (Anderson-Stojanović 1987: 108).

The variability of the fusiform shape has been attributed to unguentaria's chronological development. That is, it is thought that these alterations indicate a "progressive inventiveness" which ultimately led to the development of the piriform type. This transition between fusiform and piriform has been documented at Corinth and Stobi, though there is currently no consensus on why this change transpired (cf. Anderson-Stojanović 1987; McPhee and Pemberton 2012; Rotroff 2006; Slane 2017).

Unguentaria are one of the more common types of burial goods recovered from the Jerusalem necropolis's Second Temple Period (approximately 538 BCE – 70 CE) tombs. The most foundational study of these vessels is that of Kahane (1952, 1953). When describing the different pottery types discovered within the necropolis, Kahane classified the city's piriform unguentaria into four varieties, respectively termed A, B, C, and D. Notably, only varieties A and B are found in ossuary tombs.

Kahane's variants differ in respect to both physical appearance and cultural associations. Variant A has a comparatively long neck, typically combined with an offset rim. These vessels are generally not well made, and they average from 10-20 cm in height. Variant B is distinguishable from A by its shorter neck. Of the two variants which do not occur in ossuary tombs, C dates to the first half of the first century CE. This variety has a projecting rim and a

swelling tubular neck markedly set off against the body; its height varies between 8-18 cm, and it was locally manufactured. Variant D, in contrast, is thought to be of Nabataean origin.

Averaging around 8-12 cm, this variant has a beehive-shaped body with a shallow base and an offset rim (Abu Raya and Zissu 2000). Types A and B are typologically older than C and D.

Variant B, which is almost certainly of Greek origin, can be typologically traced back further than A and was likely the original impetus for both variants A and D. Presumably B split into these different forms sometime during the second half of the first century BCE (Kahane 1952, 1953). Variant A itself occurs frequently in both Greek and later Roman contexts.

In terms of social placement, unguentaria from the necropolis have been found in both elite and non-elite settings. More specifically, these materials have been found with not only high-status priestly families (Avigad 1958: 21-29) but also lower-class individuals who were alternatively of diasporic origin (Avni and Greenhut 1996: 59-70) or involved in the city's textile trade (Avigad 1958). More noteworthy "elite" locations include Catacomb 20 at Bet She'arim and Chamber 1D at the Akeldama complex. Notable non-elite placements include the differing loculi complexes that exist in the necropolis' zones 4-8 (Kloner and Zissu 2007), a classification which includes varying tombs from both Mount Scopus and Mount Zion (Kloner and Zissu 2007: 220-285). This variety of placements indicates a widespread usage of unguentaria within Jerusalem's Jewish community that was not dictated by social position.

A great number of theories have been proposed concerning the actual usage of these Jerusalem unguentaria. The vessels' shape and form indicate they could have served as containers for substances such as wine, water, oil, perfume, or honey (Avigad 1956: 334; Frangié-Joly 2016; Kahane 1952: 131, 1953: 48), and certainly it is widely accepted that aromatic oils were valued in the ancient world as both items of religious ritual and general self-

care (cf. Castela et.al. 2009; Dalby 2002; Dayagi-Mendels 1991). However, past residue analyses of Judaeon finds have suggested that the vessels may have also contained granulated substances such as spices or incense (Anderson-Stojanović 1987: 116; Hachlili 2005: 383). Indeed, Jewish texts do mention that “bones may be sprinkled with wine and oil” or dried herbs (Sem. 12.9). Yet it remains a matter of debate whether these actions actually took place inside the tomb (cf. Green 2008).

Certain scholars suggest that unguentaria could have served multiple functions differing according to burial stage. Presumably these functions would have included sprinkling perfume on the deceased’s body, cleansing the body with water and oil prior to wrapping the remains in a burial shroud, purification of the tomb after primary interment, and helping to decompose the body while preventing unpleasant odors (Rahmani 1961: 118; Rubin 1977: 202; Kloner 1980: 255). One additional hypothesis of interest suggests that unguentaria were placed with the dead by the living as a way to commemorate the deceased (Green 2008); it relies heavily on the assumption that unguentaria had only a symbolic usage in burial rites (Anderson-Stojanović 1987: 121-122). Yet, though this theory has its merits, the ability of unguentaria to serve as objects of mourning does not preclude their ability to perform different mortuary functions. It is not unreasonable to assume that the vessels’ usage was dictated by both utilitarian and personal associations, as indeed these factors may not have been fully distinguishable in the actual performance of burial rituals.

4) Non-Jewish Usage of Unguentaria

Unguentaria were extensively used within not only Jewish settings but also a wide variety of differentiated cultural spheres throughout the Mediterranean. Within past studies scholars

alternatively referred to these items as “Hellenizing” objects, whose presence was thought to indicate the integration of regional peoples into a definitive, monolithic culture (cf. Avigad 1953, 1958). Currently, as scholarship within the past three decades has greatly complicated the topic of “Hellenization” and its proposed one-way cultural adoption (cf. Mairs 2013), these unguentaria are understood to have possessed a variety of localized, unique meanings and are no longer assumed to bear a unidirectional cultural association.

These unguentaria are almost exclusively found in burials. Though there have been examples in which individuals were found buried with only a single unguentarium, there have also been instances, namely in Athens, where simple pit graves include more than thirty vessels (Anderson-Stojanović 1989; Rotroff 2006). This widespread usage and the presumably inexpensive nature of the items thus suggests that unguentaria would again have been a readily accessible grave good for many social classes.

General theories concerning non-Jewish mortuary unguentaria often reference the possibility of the vessels serving as symbolic offerings to the dead. This notion rests heavily on the conclusion that unguentaria’s function originally developed from earlier Greek burial ceramics known as *lekythoi*, specifically white-ground *lekythoi* (Anderson-Stojanović 1989: 119; Kurtz and Boardman 1971: 164-165; Pemberton 1985: 285). *Lekythoi* were vessels with a narrow body and a single handle attached at the neck; white-ground *lekythoi* are found almost exclusively within mortuary contexts and are often painted with images of mourning or death (see Image 4). The transition from *lekythoi* to unguentaria is thought to have occurred in the fourth century BCE; why this alteration occurred is not immediately evident, though it may have been the result of broader socioeconomic patterns (Rostroff 2006: 150).

However, these vessels almost certainly had other uses outside of mortuary contexts. Unguentaria have been discovered in cisterns and wells, and Khairy (1980) has even argued that these vessels played a key role in the oil trade of Nabatean kings. Nevertheless, the predominant tendency to discover these goods within burials, combined with their likely development from lekythoi, does indicate that, regardless of other utilization, unguentaria did have an explicit association with broader, non-Jewish patterns of mortuary ritual. Yet it remains reasonable to suppose that the precise utilization of these mortuary items was indeed variable. That is, the vessels' usage was likely not restricted to a single ritualized action but rather a variety of individuals' differing burial prerogatives.

5) Theories of Tradition

Thanks to the efforts of past scholars, there is certainly no shortage of information concerning both unguentaria as a broad vessel type and their localized development. However, as has been previously noted, these descriptive overviews do not sufficiently engage with these items as topics of theoretical interest. Hence, I will now diverge from this presentation and orient Jerusalem's unguentaria within the current extent of scholarly theories concerning tradition. Tradition as a theoretical concept has been most notably discussed by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983). In this work, Hobsbawm revealed that certain "traditional" aspects of modern cultures, most notably the Scottish tartan, were not of some ancient, deep-set origin but instead more recent social developments. For Hobsbawm, the main characteristic of this construction, or "invention" of tradition, is the historically artificial ties, or "creative transformations," a group constructs with its proposed past (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

In *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm noted that both “historically accurate” traditions and invented traditions share one definite characteristic: the promotion of social stability. Namely, because both forms of tradition impose upon a select community a certain set of fixed practices and expected behaviors, the group is provided definition when otherwise it may be culturally or socially disjointed. Hence tradition, whether “real” or invented, provides a source of grounding, a way for individuals to perform an identity through their actions and the material expressions of those actions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

Since the publication of *The Invention of Tradition*, scholars have transformed certain aspects of Hobsbawm’s original theory. More precisely, invention is now understood as not merely an isolated, or idiosyncratic, component of traditions’ development. Within the realm of Religious Studies, this notion has been expressed through the concept of “sacred creativity” (Palmisano and Pannofino 2017). Contemporary scholars have largely crafted this notion from the work of William James (1902), who articulated this idea as one in which the “ontological imagination” gave understandable form to concepts of an otherwise mystical, numinous nature.

More recently, Palmisano and Pannofino (2017) have built upon these past concepts of “sacred creativity” and pointedly argued that Hobsbawm’s concept of invented tradition should be termed “inventive” tradition. Inventive tradition differs from invented tradition through its recognition that the creation of new or fictive relationships with the past is not merely a tangential occurrence. That is, historical veracity is not itself the most immediate concern when performing a tradition; the true emphasis is the value placed upon the memory or event which the tradition perpetuates.

The greater significance of inventive tradition is that, unlike Hobsbawm’s invented tradition, it is not inherently past-oriented. That is, neither historical accuracy nor past actions are

necessarily the medium of memory creation. Inventive tradition is thus a “future-oriented operation” (Palmisano and Pannofino 2017: 31-33) in that it is a formative practice through which a select group is able to reflect upon its own internal culture even while critically constructing new innovative roles for the values it advocates. Inventiveness, then, is an intrinsic aspect of the way traditions deliver and construct memory. The greater implication of this perspective is that tradition may be understood as not merely a stagnant archiving of past events but rather a dynamic, fluid enactment of memory delivery and reception.

The concept of inventive tradition bears a close similarity to Somers’ (1994) notion of ontological narratives. Ontological narratives may be defined as the ways in which individuals view themselves and their interpretation of what actions and values should accompany that perception. Implicit within this concept is the notion that individuals are capable of adjusting their ontological narratives to meet the needs that they face within their particular chronological and cultural setting.

Somers (1994) suggests that these adjustments occur in a complex process. In this process, ontological narratives produce actions which in turn recreate an individual’s narrative through what is ultimately a mutually constitutive effort. Therefore, the action component of ontological narratives is not only a performative process but also formative, for by engaging in these actions, or those narrative aspects which involve some manner of personal engagement or practice as opposed to indirect reflection, individuals are allowed a certain creative agency to reinvent the values transmitted by the narrative. Should the larger, embedded environment around an individual significantly alter, then that individual’s creative capacity will likewise shift. Consequently, it is possible to argue that all ontological narratives must be analyzed within the context of their wider socio-cultural settings because they do not effectively exist outside of them

(Somers 1994). The “action” component of ontological narratives may also be referred to as traditions, and their capacity to adjust according to environmental changes is not dissimilar from that of inventiveness. The significance of this correlation is that the creation of inventive traditions should not be divorced from their actual performance. Indeed, by positioning the concept of inventive tradition more fully within this language of ontological narrative, it is possible to articulate that the enactment of a tradition is effectively the means by which the values carried by that tradition are both adopted and reconfigured.

This notion of ontological narrative has been extensively utilized in Somers’ (1994) presentation of narrative identity formation. This concept suggests that all identities are constructed by “being located or locating [themselves] in social narratives rarely of [their own] making” (Somers 1994: 606). That is, identities, or narratives, arise as a result of their embeddedness within more widespread, relational networks and temporal events. As previously noted, inventive tradition may be equated with the enactment of individuals’ narratives. This correlation indicates that inventive tradition must be understood as the vital means through which individuals’ self-perceptions are created and not merely a side effect of those perceptions.

6) Unguentaria and Inventive Tradition

In applying these theoretical approaches to unguentaria, it should first be reiterated that living-dead interactions would have been a pivotal way for Jewish communities to construct their self-understandings. The presence of unguentaria variants A and B within Jerusalem mortuary rituals thus denotes the incorporation of materials without an explicit “Jewish” nature or origin into a highly-negotiated sphere of activity immediately involved in memory formation and value transmission. It is possible, then, to construe this particular instance as an example of Jewish

mortuary tradition being created through engagements with a wider social realm. These traditions were effectively recreated and renegotiated while embedded within larger material and administrative matrices. Therefore it may be carefully stated that within this proposed unguentaria case study one does not see the “untainted” construction of Jewish identities within a culturally homogenous sphere but instead individuals’ interactions with wider material matrices whilst engaging in the formative processes by which those identities were constructed.

These assertions are not meant to imply that there was no sense of a distinctive Jewish identity in the Hellenistic period. Rather, this argument is merely meant to emphasize that within this era Jewish identities, and the traditions that created them, were not essentialized cultural features bounded by some absolute corpus of religious or social values. Instead, these identities and traditions were the products of these communities’ embeddedness within larger chronological, geographic, and social environments.

7) Significance of Case Study in Contemporary Scholarship

The greater significance of this theoretical application is that by strategically informing, and expanding, current scholarly conversations dedicated to Hellenistic Jewish identities this case study makes it possible to argue that unguentaria do indeed bear theoretical significance. One of the main reasons why Hellenistic Jews have garnered exceptional attention within identity studies is due to a wealth of extant Jewish textual sources. These sources provide an abundance of emic perspectives on the emergence of Hellenistic administrative control even while indicating that the Jews of this period never lost a sense of their own distinct identity. Within the past two decades, analyses of these texts have enacted a series of new scholarly trends. Specifically, it has become standard to discuss these identities in terms of a multivocal dialectic.

Indeed, instead of assuming binary, bounded social or cultural groupings, it is now understood that there was an ongoing dialogue between peoples that shaped and molded all involved parties (cf. Hengel 1989; Honigman 2003; Rajak 2001). These presumptions have been mirrored by a more general adoption within Classical circles of such language as that of “Hellenistic Koine.” This concept expresses the idea that there arose during the Hellenistic period some manner of cultural, religious, or even ideological unity between varying social groups (Papantoniou 2012: 41-43).

This developing perspective has certainly not been a reality for the majority of this subject’s history. Stark notions of a linear distinction between “Jew” and “other” have their roots in the Hebrew Bible, where Jewish writers condemn one another for admixture with such groups as the Canaanites and Ammonites, saying “make no treaty with them and show them no mercy; do not intermarry with them” (Deut. 1:1-3). David Biale has similarly noted that the Mekhilta, one of the oldest rabbinic midrashim, likely contributed to these notions through its suggestion that there were four reasons why the Jews remained distinct from their neighbors: they retained their names, maintained their language, did not violate sexual prohibitions, and did not collude with foreign governments (cf. Biale 2002: xxx; Mekhilta, Bo, parasha 5).

Yet as David Biale (2002) has also noted, the reality of Jewish culture throughout both the Hellenistic and Roman periods does not adhere to the image presented in texts such as the Mekhilta. To the contrary, it is widely recognized that Jewish communities readily adopted Greek names and spoke Koine Greek even while acting as informants to non-Jewish authorities. To be sure, both Jewish and non-Jewish texts contain plenty of instances in which alienation and hostility run rampant. Collins (1983: 151-152) has argued that the fifth book of the Sibylline Oracles stands as a case in point with its denouncements of foreign idolatry: “they worship

stones and brute beasts instead of God” (5.75). Yet Collins (2005: 7) has also argued that such excoriations do not absolutely denote a binary sense of sociocultural division. Rather, these critiques indicate a practice of enlivened sociocultural engagement in which the Jews were reflecting upon themselves even while contemplating the social “other.” There is no sense that this social other was a removed aspect of Jewish life; indeed it appears evident that these actors were a vital component of the Jews’ own understanding of self, for by contemplating these actors the Jews were effectively categorizing what they “were” by identifying what they “were not” (cf. Ben Zvi and Edelman 2014; Birnbaum 2004).

Among these more recent approaches to questions of Hellenistic Jewish identity is that of the aforementioned scholars Erich Gruen (2011) and David Biale (2002). In response to this trend in scholarship, I will here refer to this model as the “engaged model.” The engaged model advocates that scholars should no longer construe the Jews as “outsiders” who merely borrowed from their Hellenistic, and later Roman, administrative surroundings when it suited their proclivities. Instead, it asserts that scholars must recognize the full, engaged participation of the Jews within larger cultural systems and their effect upon cultural change both within Judaea and the wider Classical world. The engaged model is beneficial in that it effectively ends the tiresome chase to determine “who influenced whom” through its depiction of the Jews functioning as fully actualized members of a broader social system.

Though these recent developments have done much to advance understandings of Hellenistic Jewish identities, they remain limited due to their reliance upon sources authored by only a select, presumably elite, portion of the Jewish population. What’s more, these primary texts tend to reveal more about the ideology than the practice of traditions. Though scholars often mine these writings for reflections of identity, ultimately these sources only relate the way individuals

were “supposed” to enact traditions as opposed to the way those enactments actually transpired. Incorporating unguentaria within these ongoing conversations addresses the limitations of these sources by providing a window into a more comprehensive view of Jewish society and introducing the physical mediums through which individuals’ identities were effectively being negotiated. Hence by engaging with unguentaria in a more nuanced, theoretically informed manner it becomes possible to consider questions of identity construction within a wide expanse of the Jewish population.

For archaeologists, however, the incorporation of unguentaria within theoretical discourses bears a further implication. Unguentaria have long been left out of such discussions due to the very quality that allows them to comment upon such a wide expanse of society, namely their ubiquity. Archaeological applications of past identity theories have focused heavily upon “personalized” materials such as brooches, pins, or other individual adornments. Though analyzing more “common,” widespread items is daunting simply due to their vast numbers, this project has revealed that unguentaria should not be neglected within future archaeological engagements with models of identity construction. Rather, the qualities which make these vessels difficult to comment upon are the same qualities which ultimately enable them to further scholars’ conceptualization of how those constructions were both experienced and disseminated throughout Jewish society.

The benefits of incorporating such ubiquitous archaeological materials into contemporary discussions of Hellenistic identities are not restricted to Jewish contexts, however. The Hellenistic era is rife with instances of peoples regularly proclaiming connections to other groups through the creation of new cultural ties. Sources from this era indicate that an assemblage of peoples engaged with the myth of Perseus, and it is known that groups such as the Numidians

found links to other peoples of the Near East by establishing commonality through Greek and Punic genealogies (Bremmer 2008; Gruen 2011: 239). Therefore, it is evident that the Jews were not the only individuals engaging in cross-boundary value transmissions, and it stands that researchers would indeed do well to consider the benefits of widespread material evidence, such as unguentaria, when crafting new approaches to local or regional identities within this particular chronological period.

8) Conclusion

This study has argued that unguentaria are capable of positively engaging with, and expanding, developing concepts of identity theory. By breaking with past, solely descriptive presentations of these vessels and incorporating them within theoretical models, scholars are able to convincingly argue that nuanced processes of identity construction were not restricted to merely a few select Jewish individuals. Instead, it becomes possible to extend theories of inventive tradition and narrative identity creation to a much wider portion of Jewish society. Hence, through its various discussions, this project has also revealed that unguentaria can be understood as items that were intimately involved in the creation of individuals' self-perceptions and not merely passive reflections of more "dynamic" identity constructions. Ultimately, for archaeologists, the greater significance of this argument is that it is necessary to begin to reevaluate which types of materials are considered when applying theoretical models to the archaeological record. Future archaeological applications of identity theory should be extended to not only personalized goods but also widespread, and historically overlooked, portions of the archaeological record.

In terms of future projects, there currently exists no shortage of differing thematic avenues through which this research may be further developed. One of the more fascinating lines of thought worth considering is the relationship between Jewish texts' appeals to "ancestral values" and the recreation of those values within the enactment of inventive tradition. This concept is particularly worth pursuing in the outlined context of mortuary ritual, as it may be possible to chronologically trace the ways in which each realm developed and perhaps altered the other. Yet, in order to further emphasize the importance of "ubiquitous" materials when crafting material applications of inventive tradition and narrative identity within Judaea, it would also be beneficial to pursue specific case studies focused upon individual tombs. Though this thesis has brought immediate attention to the theoretical significance of these materials, hopefully it has also initiated a positive beginning point from which later studies may address these continuing lines of thought.

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Appendix

Image 1: Fusiform Unguentarium #1



Photo courtesy of The British Museum

Registration number: 1951,0907.3. Unglazed fusiform unguentarium of orange-brown clay.
Produced 3rd c. – 1st c. BCE. Found in Selinus, Sicily.

Image 2: Fusiform Unguentarium #2



Photo courtesy of the British Museum

Registration number: 1863,0728.229. Unglazed unguentarium of pale clay. Produced 3rd c. – 1st c. BCE. Excavated in Agrigento, Sicily.

Image 3: Piriform Unguentarium



Photo courtesy of the British Museum

Registration number: 1814,0704.1104. Coarse-ware piriform unguentarium of light brown clay with dark brown slip. Produced 1st c. BCE – 1st c. CE.

Image 4: Lekythoi



Photo courtesy of the British Museum

Registration number: 1873,0820.303. Three mortuary lekythoi attributed to the Reed Painter.
Produced 420 - 400 BCE. Discovered in Athens.